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THE

ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE

BETWEEN

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM,

AND THE

Baptism of John,

MORE FULLY STATED AND CONFIRMED;

IN REPLY TO A PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED

"A PLEA FOR PRIMITIVE COMMUNION."

BY ROBERT HALL, M.A.

London: Printed by W. Clowes,

BRITISH MUSEUM

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Preface.

WHETHER the writer of the following pages has acted judiciously in noticing the anonymous author of the *Plea, &c.* it is not for him to determine. He was certainly not induced to reply by any apprehension that the arguments of his opponent would produce much effect on candid and enlightened minds: but he recollected that what is not answered, is often deemed unanswerable. He has confined himself, as the reader will perceive, to that branch of the controversy which relates to the baptism of John; the consideration of the remaining parts, will more properly occur in reply to a work which is already announced to the public by a person of distinguished reputation. With an answer to that publication, it is the decided resolution of this author to terminate *his* part of the controversy.

Leicester, February 14, 1816.

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Leicester, February 14, 1812.

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BETWIXT

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM,

AND THE

Baptism of John,

&c.

THOUGH the author of the "Plea for Primitive Communion" has not thought fit to annex his name to that publication, as truth alone is the legitimate object of controversy, his claim to attention may be justly considered as little, if at all, impaired by that omission. Religious inquiry is an affair of principles, not of persons; and under whatever shape an author chuses to present himself to the public, he is entitled to notice in proportion to the force of his conceptions, and the candour of his spirit. How far the author under present consideration is possessed of these qualities, must be left to the judgment of an impartial public.

As he has confined nearly his whole attention to the question of the identity of John's baptism with the ordinance now in force, without pretending to enter into the general merits of the controversy, and this is a question which admits of separate discussion, and is in itself of some moment, the following pages will be devoted to a defence of the sentiments which have been already advanced on that subject.

Previously to this, however, the patience of the reader is entreated for a few moments, while we endeavour clearly to state the *bearing* of this question on the controversy with which it has been connected. It was in deference to the sentiments of his opponents, rather than his own, that the author was induced to bestow so much attention upon it in his former treatise, persuaded as he is, that its connexion with the point in debate is casual and incidental, rather than real and intrinsic; since the only possible advantage to the cause of mixed communion resulting from its decision, is the overthrow of an argument most feebly constructed. To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to remember that the admission of what our opponents contend for, would merely prove that the ordinance of baptism was promulgated at an *earlier period* than the Lord's supper. But in deter-

mining a question of duty resulting from positive laws, the era of their promulgation is a consideration totally foreign; we have merely to consider *what is enjoined*, and to what description of persons or things the regulation applies, without troubling ourselves to inquire into the chronological order of its enactment. In the details of civil life, no man thinks of regulating his actions, by an appeal to the respective dates of the existing laws, but solely by a regard to their just interpretation; and were it once admitted as a maxim, that the particular law latest enacted, must invariably be last obeyed, the affairs of mankind would fall into utter confusion. It would be the highest presumption to pretend to penetrate so far into the breast of the legislator, and into reasons of state, as to form a conjecture on the comparative importance of our duties, or the respective relations which they bear to each other, by an appeal to the distinct periods in which the laws were promulgated; nor is there any absurdity in supposing it possible that for the wisest purposes, the law which is *last* enacted may prescribe the performance of an action antecedently to a different one enjoined by a prior enactment. Besides the most extensive branch of the system of rules which is in

force in this, and perhaps in most other countries, arises out of immemorial customs, which it would baffle the profoundest antiquarian to trace to their origin; whence it is evident that the principle in question, is necessarily excluded from the widest department of legal obligations. It is a principle as repugnant to the nature of divine as it is to human legislation. It appears from the history of the patriarchs, that sacrificial rites were ordained much earlier than circumcision, but no sooner was the latter enjoined, than it demanded the earliest attention, and the offerings prescribed on the birth of a child, did not precede, but were subsequent to the ceremony of circumcision.

In the case of moral obligations, no one pretends that their reciprocal relation and dependance is to be ascertained by an appeal to the distinct periods of their institution: their co-existence with human nature precludes the possibility of applying such a test; and he who consults impartially the dictates of conscience, confirmed and enlightened by revelation, will seldom feel himself embarrassed with respect either to the nature or the order of his duties.

In the case of positive duties, that is, such as result entirely from the *revealed* will of

God, and with respect to which the voice of nature is silent, how far they are so inseparably linked together as to form a moral whole, in such a manner that the omission of one part renders an attention to the other a nullity, must depend entirely on the language of the institute. To attempt to establish any conclusion where that is silent, is at once to incur the censure justly attached to the application of hypothesis in the interpretation of positive laws, with this additional aggravation that the hypothesis adopted on the present occasion, is at least as precarious and unfounded as the worst of those by which the advocates of infant-baptism have attempted to vindicate their practice. With unparalleled inconsistency, while the champions of strict communion, affect on the subject of baptism, the utmost veneration for the letter of scripture, they are driven in support of their sentiments to appeal, not to *what is enjoined*—not to a syllable of scripture, but to a chronological deduction of positive rites; a hard necessity surely, and the more so when it will appear in the sequel, that this their forlorn post is untenable.

Before we proceed to notice the objections of the author of the "Plea" to the state-

ments which have been made on the subject of John's baptism, it will be necessary briefly to recapitulate the grounds on which it was affirmed to be essentially distinct from the ordinance now in use. To such as have not perused the former treatise, the discussion would scarcely be intelligible without it, to such as have, it is possible, some particulars may be presented in a clearer light.

The attentive reader of the New Testament will not fail to have remarked that the rite performed by John is rarely, if ever, introduced without the addition of some explanatory phrase, or epithet, intended apparently to distinguish it from every preceding or subsequent religious observance. Thus it is sometimes denominated the baptism of John, on other occasions baptism in water, and the baptism of repentance, but is never expressed in the absolute form in which the mention of christian baptism invariably occurs. When the twelve disciples at Ephesus are asked into what (*i. e.* into what profession) they were baptised, they reply into the baptism of John. Though innumerable persons were baptised by St. Paul, we read of no such expression as the baptism of Paul; on the contrary, in his epistle to the Corinthians he expresses a

sort of pious horror at the very idea of such a supposition. Whoever considers the extreme precision which the inspired historians maintain in the choice of the terms employed to represent religious ordinances, will perceive this circumstance to possess considerable weight.

It derives much additional strength however from reflecting that John's baptism is not only distinctly characterised in the evangelical narratives, but that he himself contrasts it with a superior one, which he directs his hearers to expect at the hand of the Messiah. "I indeed," said he, "baptise you in water, but there standeth one among you, whose shoe-latchets I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptise you in the Holy Ghost and in fire;" referring unquestionably to that redundance of prophetic and miraculous gifts, which were bestowed on the church, after the effusion of the Spirit. We accordingly find that, after his resurrection, our Lord commissioned his Apostles to teach and baptise all nations, the execution of which order was *usually* accompanied by the collation of such gifts on believers, as fully corresponded to those predictions. Though he who is confined to no times or seasons, was pleased in some instances to communicate these preternatural endowments, previously to the act

of baptising, at others not in connexion with that rite, yet that they were its usual and expected concomitants, is evident from the language of St. Paul to the disciples at Ephesus, who not having heard of such an effusion of the Spirit were interrogated in the following terms: "Into what then were ye baptised?" a question totally irrelevant, but upon the supposition that these gifts were the usual appendage or effect of that ordinance. No such consequences followed the rite administered by John; an important disparity, to which he himself repeatedly directed the attention of his followers, as a decisive proof of his personal inferiority to him that *was to come*, as well as of the ceremony he administered, to that which should usher in the succeeding dispensation. In exact agreement with the genius of eastern phraseology, he suppresses the mention of *water* on this occasion, chusing rather to characterise an ordinance accompanied with such stupendous effects, by its more elevated feature, rather than by one, in which it coincided with his own.

Again, it is universally admitted that christian baptism has invariably been administered in the name of Jesus, and that circumstance is essential to its validity; while it is evident

from the solicitude with which our Saviour avoided the avowal of himself as the Messiah, that during his personal ministry, his name was not publicly employed as the object of a religious rite. After he had been declared on the mount of transfiguration to be the Son of God, he charged his disciples to tell no man of it, till he was risen from the dead, and when Peter had solemnly avowed his profession of faith in him under the same character, he and his fellow-apostles were strictly enjoined to tell no man that he *was the Christ.* Nor is there a single example of his publicly acknowledging that fact, until his arraignment before the High Priest. But how this is consistent with the practice of baptising in his name, which must have been equivalent at least to a public confession of his being the Messiah, it is difficult to conceive. If we examine the matter more closely, we shall perceive that ceremony to import much more, that it includes an act of adoration and of worship, of which he in whose name we are immersed, is the avowed object. To multiply words with a view to demonstrate the inconsistency of such a procedure, with the acknowledged reserve maintained by our Lord on this subject, would be to insult the understanding of my readers; nor when fur-

nished with certain matter of fact, are we left to form an opinion from previous probabilities. The historian informs us that while John was baptising, amidst an immense concourse of people from various parts of Judæa, *all men were musing in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not,*[a] and that the deputation sent from the Sanhedrim to inquire into his character, were disposed to infer from his introducing a new religious rite, that he pretended himself to be the Messiah. But how is it possible, let me ask, that such a question should arise amongst the people on the hypothesis maintained by our opponents? or how could it enter into their imagination to infer, from his baptising in the name of Jesus, that he himself was, or that he pretended to be, the Messiah. His constant and daily practice must have completely precluded such a suspicion.

If St. Paul's citation of the language of John, in the nineteenth of the Acts, be correct, what he said to the people was this—"That they *should* believe on him who was to come."[b] The epithet, ὁ ἐρχομενος, *he who is coming*, it is generally admitted, was the usual appellation applied to the Messiah at that period, which while

[a] Luke 3, xv. [b] Acts 19, iv.

it expresses the certainty and near approach of the event of his coming, intimates not less clearly, its *futurity*. At the time when the son of Zechariah entered on his ministry, nothing could be more accurate than the idea conveyed by that phraseology—the Messiah was not yet manifest to Israel; John was sent before him to announce his speedy appearance; he was as yet coming, not actually come: on which account, the language which the forerunner held was precise and appropriate; it was not a demand of present faith in any known individual, but was limited to a *future* faith on a certain personage who was about to evince his title to the character he assumed by his personal appearance and miracles. He said to the people that they *should* believe in him that was to come. Could the same person, let me ask, at the same moment be described by terms expressive of the present, and of the future tense, at once as an existing individual, a person historically known, and as one that was to come. In a word, if John expressed the act of faith which he required, in the future tense,[c] it unquestionably respected a future act; and if he described its object under the term ο ερχομενος, *he that is to come*, he did not immerse in the

[c] πιστευσωσι, Acts 19, iv.

name of Jesus, which would have been a palpable contradiction.

Again, the spiritual import of christian baptism, as asserted by St. Paul, transcends incomparably the measure of religious knowledge possessed during the ministry of John. "Know ye not," is his appeal to Christians, "that so many of you as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death; therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."[d] We have here an appeal to the conscience of all baptised persons respecting the spiritual signification of that ordinance, the views which it embraced, and the obligations resulting from thence to a holy and heavenly life. What is the meaning of the words *baptised into his death?* Whatever else it may comprehend, it unquestionably means the being baptised into a belief of his death. But at the time that John was fulfilling his course, this belief was so far from possessing the minds of his converts, that even the Apostles were not only ignorant of that event, but impatient of its mention; and with respect to

[d] Romans 6, iv.

his resurrection we find these same Apostles after the transfiguration inquiring among themselves "what the rising from the dead could mean;"[o] while from the expectation of the Jews at large, nothing was more abhorrent than the death and crucifixion of their Messiah. While they were thus unacquainted with the principal fact it is designed to exhibit, how could they possibly comprehend the import of christian baptism? In all probability they regarded the consecrated use of water merely as an emblem of purification, of that reformation of manners to which they were summoned; for to such a use of it they had long been accustomed; but for the sublime mysteries of the christian sacrament, connected with events of which they were ignorant, and with truths which were veiled from their eyes, they were utterly unprepared. It is impossible to evade the force of this argument, by distinguishing betwixt the disciples of John, and those who were converted to the christian faith at a subsequent period. The language of St. Paul precludes the possibility of such a distinction. "*As many of us,*" says he, "as were baptised into Jesus Christ were baptised into his death;" which is surely equivalent to affirming that whoever were not bap-

[o] Mark 9, 10.

tised into his death, were not baptised into Christ. But the disciples of John were not baptised into (the belief of) his death. Therefore they were not baptised into Christ.

We have already remarked, in a former treatise, that as the ministry of John commenced previously to that of the Messiah, which succeeded his baptism, no rite celebrated at that time is entitled to a place amongst christian sacraments, since they did not commence with the christian dispensation, nor issue from the authority of Christ as Head of the Church. The sacraments properly christian, undoubtedly belong to *the Kingdom of God*, a phrase which is constantly employed in scripture to denote that state of things which is placed under the avowed administration of the Messiah, and which consequently could not precede his personal appearance. But during his residence on earth, until his resurrection, this Kingdom is uniformly represented as future, though near at hand. Even after John's imprisonment, the language which he held respecting that object is the same: "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel;"[f] which is

[f] Mark i, 15.

also the precise intelligence he commanded the seventy disciples to proclaim,[g] a little before his decease. He was inaugurated into his office at his baptism, till which period he remained in the obscurity of private life, at the utmost remove from assuming a legislative character.

An attention to the general history of the period to which these transactions refer, will conduct us to the same conclusion. When we consider the great popularity attached to the ministry of the forerunner, and the general submission of the Jewish people to his doctrine, it is in the highest degree improbable, that of the three thousand who were added by St. Peter to the church on one day, there were none who had been previously his disciples: this incredible supposition is reduced to an impossibility, when we recollect that of the twelve apostles, two are actually affirmed by an Evangelist to have been of that number. But as it is universally admitted that they who were savingly convinced of the truth of Christianity after the Pentecost, were baptised on that occasion, what conclusion can be more inevitable, than that the rite administered by the harbinger of our Lord, was essentially distinct from the christian ordinance.

[g] Luke x. 11.

To conclude this branch of the subject, the Acts of the Apostles furnish us with a decisive instance of an Apostle's rebaptising certain disciples of John at Ephesus; but as we shall have occasion hereafter to examine that incident more fully, in reply to the evasions of the author of the *Plea,* I shall content myself at present with barely referring to it.

Such are the principal grounds on which we have ventured to assert the fundamental disparity betwixt the baptism of John, and the christian institute.

We now proceed to notice the manner in which the author of the *Plea for Primitive Communion* attempts to evade these arguments.

I. He endeavours to invalidate the assertion that John's commission did not originate in the command of Christ, or that he on any occasion ascribes his mission to the Father, in distinction from the Son. The author of *Terms of Communion* is charged with representing "John as uniformly doing that of which there is no decisive evidence he ever did at all, that is, ascribe his commission to the Father, *in distinction from the Son.*"[h]

[h] Plea for Primitive Communion, page 21.

We should have supposed that when the origin of a certain proceeding is constantly assigned to one agent, and no notice is taken of another, there is no impropriety in affirming that the proceeding in question, is ascribed to him who *is* mentioned, in distinction from him who is *not*. But let the scripture speak for itself, and let the reader judge whether John did, or did not, ascribe his commission to the Father, in distinction from any other person. "He who sent me to baptise," said he, "the same said unto me, He on whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and abiding on him, He it is who shall baptise in the Holy Ghost, and in fire."[1] Here the personage speaking distinguishes himself from the Messiah, as clearly as words can distinguish him, for he speaks of Christ in the third person, while he himself is denoted by the first; and so uniform is the language of scripture on this subject, that not a syllable is to be found in which the mission of John is ascribed to any other person, than the Father.

But to ascribe any operation whatever to the Father in distinction from the Son, this writer contends, is inconsistent with the be-

[1] John i. 33.

lief of the ineffable union which subsists betwixt those divine personages! "Will those," he asks, "who believe the ineffable union of the Father and the Son, be disposed to conclude from this text that John derived his authority from the Father, to the exclusion of the Son." To which I reply that believing firmly as himself, that there is such a union subsisting betwixt the personages in the blessed Godhead as constitutes them one living and true God, instead of inferring from thence, the impropriety of distinguishing their operations, it has always appeared to me, that the chief advantage resulting from the doctrine of the Trinity is, that it facilitates our conception of the plan of redemption, in which each of these glorious persons is represented as assuming distinct, though harmonious, offices and functions; the Father originating, so to speak, the Son executing, and the Spirit applying the several parts of that stupendous scheme. The Father accordingly is uniformly asserted to have sent the Son, the Son to have assumed the office of Mediator, and the Spirit to be imparted by both, to enlighten and sanctify the elect people of God. If we suffer ourselves to lose sight of such an ap-

[1] Plea for Primitive Communion, page 21.

plication of the doctrine, it subsides into barren and useless speculation. And are we to be told that such is the ineffable union betwixt the Father and the Son, that the distinct exercise of these functions is an impossibility? We should have supposed that the act of *sending*, at least, might be safely ascribed to the Father, in distinction from the Son; unless perhaps this author in the plenitude of his subtlety, has discovered a method by which a person may send himself. In spite of attempts to bewilder the plain reader by unmeaning obstructions, it will remain a palpable fact, that John's commission is ascribed to the Father, and to him alone; and that having originated before our Saviour assumed the legislative function, it is in no respect entitled to be considered as a christian institute. In addition to which we have only to remark, that to insist upon deriving John's mission from our Lord, is to implicate him in the charge of employing a collusive mode of reasoning. In reproving the unbelief of the Jews, he observes that "he did not bear witness of himself," for had he done so, "his witness had not been true," in other words, not entitled to credit: but he adds, "there is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that which he witnesseth of me, is true. Ye sent unto

John and he bore witness to the truth."[k] But if the person to whose testimony he appeals in proof of his mission, was sent by himself, where is the force of this reasoning, or what difference in point of credibility is there, betwixt his bearing witness of himself, and his prompting another to do it for him.

II. The author of the *Plea,* next endeavours to show the *identity* of the qualifications demanded by the forerunner of our Lord, with those which were demanded by his Apostles after the day of Pentecost. After objecting to the accuracy of my statement on that article, without attempting to point out in what its incorrectness consists, he proceeds to remark that allowing it to be unexceptionably just, it will prove that the requisitions which were supposed to be different, coalesce into one and the same thing. The reason he adduces is the following: "As both John and the Apostles are described as demanding faith, so that faith is to have the same object, and to be connected with the same facts in relation to that object; only some of these facts, John's disciples were to view as approaching; while the faith of these baptised by the Apostles,

[k] John v. 31, 32, 33.

embraced them as having actually occurred; for the great events respecting the Messiah, as boldly appealed to faith, when only occupying the prophetic page, as they do now they are become interesting details in the evangelical history."[1]

It will be freely admitted that the Saviour of the world is in every period, and under every economy, the sole object of saving faith; but to infer from hence, that the profession which John demanded was an appendage of the dispensation introduced on the day of Pentecost would equally demonstrate the Levitical ceremonies to belong to it, and would thus carry back the christian dispensation to the time of Moses. The next assertion "that the belief of the same facts was required in the former instance, as in the latter," is palpably absurd, as well as the reason assigned, which is that they were foretold by the ancient prophets, and "that prophecy as boldly appealed to faith as the narrative of the Evangelist." Every one must perceive that if there is any force in this argument, it will prove that *whatever* was predicted of the Messiah, must have been distinctly understood and firmly embraced by

[1] Plea for Primitive Communion, page 23.

the disciples of the forerunner, as an essential prerequisite to the reception of baptism, since whatever was thus predicted was unquestionably presented as the object of faith; the place of his birth, his vicarious sufferings, his resurrection, the spiritual nature of his kingdom, his rejection by the Jews, and the triumphant progress of the gospel amongst the Gentiles, with an infinite number of other particulars, were attested by the prophets. But will this author contend that all these circumstances were understood by John's converts, at a time when the immediate disciples of our Lord were intoxicated with the hopes of an earthly kingdom and totally unapprised of their Master's death? Or will he condescend to inform us on what principle so much more was requisite to constitute a disciple of John, than an Apostle of the Lord. Had it been a question of duty, instead of an inquiry into matter of fact, no difficulty would have been felt in acknowledging the justice of the rebuke which the Apostles received for their hardness of heart, in not opening their minds more freely to the true interpretation of scripture: a cloud of carnal prejudices undoubtedly eclipsed a considerable portion of revealed truth, though with the best dispositions, much must have remained obscure till the ancient prophecies

were fulfilled. Previous to that period, if we listen to the inspired writers, instead of the author of the *Plea*, neither the prophets understood their own predictions, nor the Apostles their true interpretation. To apply revelation in its utmost extent, without the smallest allowance for the inevitable involutions of prophecy, as a criterion of the portion of knowledge actually possessed by the successive generations of the faithful, is a mode of reasoning peculiar to this writer. *We* possess in the Apocalypse, a serious of prophecies extending to the consummation of all things, a large portion of which is confessedly involved in obscurity; but what opinion should we entertain of the sagacity of him, who at a period subsequent to their accomplishment, should contend that we of this age must necessarily have been apprized of the events which they foretold, solely on the ground of their being the subject of prophecy. Such a reasoner will be the properest person to write a sequel to the *Plea for Primitive Communion.*

The author has been betrayed into these absurdities by confounding together two things totally distinct, a sincere belief in the truth of inspiration, with an explicit knowledge of its contents. The prophets were invested with

credentials which entitled them to the profound submission of mankind; but to receive their predictions as the word of God, is one thing, and so to penetrate their scope and intention as to be in possession of precisely the same facts, and acquainted with the same truths with those who lived to witness their accomplishment, is another. All good men equally possessing the former, had the same *spirit* of faith; while with respect to the latter, the situation of the hearers of the prophets under the law, and of the apostolic converts under the gospel, was most dissimilar. It is certain from the eulogiums bestowed upon John, that his attainments in religious knowledge surpassed the highest of those his predecessors; yet we are informed from the same authority, that the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. But in what is this superiority so universally ascribed to Christians to be placed, except in an acquaintance with the facts attested after the day of Pentecost, and a knowledge of the mysteries with which they are inseparably allied? These however form the very core and substance of the apostolical testimony, the unshaken profession of which was the indispensable condition of baptism; and among the foremost and most fundamental of these are the vicarious death

and resurrection of our Lord, which are compelled by their own testimony to believe were most remote from the previous expectation and belief of the Apostles. Christian baptism is the "answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."[m]

In order to demonstrate the equality of the requisitions of John with those of the Apostles, this writer has attempted to exhibit them in opposite columns. These columns, however, are not very majestic, nor very uniform, including only three passages on one side, and four on the other. Two remarks may be amply sufficient to counteract the effect of a device which is addressed to the eyes rather than to the understanding. The first is, that the explicit testimony which the harbinger bore to the character of our Lord after his baptism, is adduced without the slightest advertence to the distinction of times, as a proof of the manner in which he first announced his commission; but as his knowledge of the person of the Messiah, we learn from his own declaration, was subsequent to that event, his language must necessarily have been modified by that circumstance. The second is, that we have no

[m] 1 Peter.

more reason to suppose that *his* disciples comprehended the true import of his instructions, or that they interpreted them aright, than that the immediate disciples of our Lord understood similar declarations of their master; from whom, we are infallibly certain, the sublimest part of his teaching was hid, until it was elucidated by events. And what but a blind attachment to hypothesis, can obviate the suspicion that the followers of John were in the same predicament, unless we are prepared to affirm, either that they were the apter scholars, or had the more skilful master. As this writer lately applied the ample volume of prophecy as a criterion to ascertain the minimum, or lowest measure of knowledge requisite to constitute a disciple of John, so he now with equal propriety puts together all the scattered sayings of that great prophet, for the same purpose. If this be admitted in the case of the forerunner, it can with no consistency be withheld, in the instance of our Lord; and by measuring the actual attainments of the Apostles, by the extent of his instructions, we shall find them little less enlightened and intelligent after his resurrection, than they were before that event. The fact, however, is far otherwise.

It requires little penetration to perceive, that

the true method of ascertaining (as far as it is practicable) the essential qualifications of John's candidates, is not so much to consult detached sentences recorded of his ministry, as the actual state of religious knowledge at that period, the known attainments of the Apostles, and above all the language he is affirmed to have uttered, at the moment he was celebrating his peculiar rite.

Whatever ideas he himself might affix to the terms "Lamb of God," and "Son of God," which it may not be easy exactly to determine, we may be certain that his followers did not comprehend their true import, because the Apostles themselves were long after ignorant of the principal fact, or doctrine denoted by the first of these appellations; and, therefore, to introduce these passages, as this writer has done, with a design to insinuate that they conveyed to the mind precisely the same impression as at present, is to presume too much on the simplicity of the reader. He should have been aware, that few are so bereft of the power of recollection, as to be incapable of detecting such flimsy sophistry.

Aware that confidence is contagious, he uniformly abounds in that quality in exact pro-

portion to the weakness of his proofs. Of this, the following passage exhibits an egregious example:—After surveying his columns, with a complacency not unlike the Restorer of Babylon, he triumphantly exclaims, "Even prejudice itself might be expected to acknowledge, that so far from any material variation between John and the Apostles, in introducing their respective candidates to baptism, they made a near approach to a syllabic agreement."[n]

"To say nothing at present of the name of Jesus, a point we shall have occasion to discuss hereafter, did John require of his candidates a profession of their belief in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension? If he did, he was a superior teacher to his Master, and his disciples greater proficients than the Apostles; a proposition which, however "boldly it may appeal to our faith," it is hard to digest. If, on the contrary, he acknowledges that a belief of these facts was *not* required by John as the condition of baptism, while it unquestionably was of the apostolic converts, what becomes of his syllabic agreement; and what temerity, not to say impiety, to represent these stupendous events, the death and resur-

[n] Plea for Primitive Communion, page 24.

rection of the Saviour, which involve the destinies of the human race, the incessant theme of the apostolic ministry, the basis of hope, the pillar, not the miserable columns of a page, but the column which props and supports a sinking universe, an affair of syllables, so that whether they are omitted or included, there exists a *syllabic agreement!*

Justly apprehensive of fatiguing the attention of the reader, the author cannot prevail on himself to dismiss this branch of the subject without bestowing a word more on the fallacious *medium* of proof employed in this instance, by the writer of the *Plea*. Prophecy, he informs us, as "boldly appealed to faith" as history: from which the only legitimate inference is, that the disciple of revelation is as much under obligation to give implicit credit to the prophets, as to the evangelists. *His* inference, however, is that the precise measure of information yielded by the historian, must of necessity be possessed by the student of prophecy, than which nothing is more absurd and untenable. To reason in this manner is, in the first place, to forget the prodigious disparity in point of perspicuity betwixt the respective sources of information; and secondly in opposition to the

decisive and repeated testimonies of inspiration, to presume that good men have uniformly exerted the ardor, impartiality, and diligence, in the pursuit of truth to which it is justly entitled. Besides, when it is asserted that the prophetic page "as boldly appeals to faith, as the details of evangelical history," an ambiguity lurks in the word *appeal*, as well suited to the purposes of sophistry, as it is unfavorable to the enunciation of truth. It may either mean that it demands the *same credit* with historical details, or that it imposes an obligation to believe the same facts, and to penetrate the same mysteries. In the former sense the assertion is true, but foreign to the purpose; in the latter it is palpably false; at once repugnant to the nature of things as well as to the plainest fact. Many of the most important predictions were involved in a total obscurity; others were designed to excite a vague but elevated expectation, without ascertaining the features of a future event; none were designed to make that clear and determinate impression upon the spirit, which is effected by their accomplishment. From the necessary obscurity of prophecy, combined with the ignorance and prejudice which obstruct its operation, it is impossible in any case by appealing to a prediction to ascertain the sen-

timents entertained even by good men antecedently to its fulfilment. The only clue to conduct us in this inquiry, is derived from the assertions of the evangelists, which as clearly confute the vain surmises and conjectures of this writer as if they had been recorded for that purpose.

The word *faith*, to the illiterate reader is almost sure to suggest all the sentiments and ideas, with which the gospel has made him familiar; and when we attempt to limit its objects, by an impartial appeal to the actual state of religious knowledge before the coming of Christ, he feels himself confounded and amazed. His exclusive acquaintance with the present disqualifies him for transporting himself into past ages, and conceiving the ideas and sentiments prevalent in a situation so dissimilar. To do justice to the author of the *Plea*, it must be acknowledged, he has shewn no inconsiderable skill in availing himself of this prejudice.

What were the *precise views* entertained by the true Israel, of the offices of the Messiah, and of the work of redemption, previously to the christian era, is one of the most curious and intricate questions of theology. Without attempting its solution, the writer of these

lines may be permitted to remark that the jewish belief was probably much more defective, and differed much farther from the christian, than has usually been suspected. The ignorance of the Apostles, till after the resurrection is a fundamental fact, a datum, which should never be lost sight of in this inquiry. It is not necessary, however, to assume it as a standard by which to regulate our estimate of every preceding degree of information. For when we recollect the long suspension of prophetic gifts in the jewish church, the withdrawment of the Urim and Thummim, the extinction in its sensible effects at least, of the theocracy, the intermixture of Jews and Gentiles, inseparable from the introduction of a pagan government, the influence of oriental philosophy, the division of the people into sects, and the extreme profligacy and corruption of manners prevalent at the time of our Lord's nativity, it will probably appear to have been the darkest period the church had experienced, resembling that portion of the natural day which immediately precedes the dawn, when the nocturnal light is extinguished, and the reflection of a brighter luminary not commenced.

But with all the consideration due to these circumstances (and probably much is due) there

is still reason to suspect that the average degree of knowledge which divines have been accustomed to ascribe to jewish believers, has been overrated. From the typical institution of piacular sacrifices, pointing to the *great propitiation*, it has been confidently concluded that in them believers distinctly recognised the mystery of atonement, by the blood of Christ. But supposing such to have been the fact, how shall we account for that doctrine occupying so small a portion of the succeeding prophecies; or for its so completely vanishing from the national creed that the crucifixion of Christ afterwards became a stumbling block to the Jews, not less than foolishness to the Gentiles: a doctrine so congenial to the feelings of penitent devotion, involving the primary basis of hope, had it once been embraced, would undoubtedly have been inculcated with the utmost care, and transmitted to the posterity of the faithful in uninterrupted succession, instead of being suffered to fall into such oblivion, that at the time of the Saviour's advent, every trace of it had disappeared. While Christianity subsists, we entertain no apprehension of this great doctrine falling into neglect; its intrinsic evidence and importance will perpetuate it, unquestionably, amidst all the

fluctuations of systems and opinions; and by parity of reason, its clear enunciation to the jewish church, must have been productive of similar effects.

If we read the ancient prophecy with attention we shall perceive, that the atonement made by the Saviour is scarcely exhibited in a single passage, except in the fifty-third of Isaiah, with respect to which the Ethiopian eunuch was at a loss to determine whether the "prophet spoke of himself, or of some other man:" we shall perceive that in the practical and devotional books, such as the Psalms, the promise of pardon to the penitent, and of favor to the righteous, are expressly and repeatedly propounded, though with respect to the *medium* of acceptance, a profound silence is maintained. But how this is consistent with the supposed knowledge of that medium, it is not easy to discover. The habitual reserve on this subject maintained by the writers of the Old Testament, compared to its constant inculcation in the New, forms the grand distinction betwixt these respective portions of revelation; clearly evincing the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that the way into the Holiest was not made manifest while the ancient sanctuary subsisted.

It will perhaps be replied—Are we then to renounce the notion of the typical nature of sacrificial rites? and, in contradiction to the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, assert that they bore no reference to the great propitiation. Nothing is more foreign from the purpose of these remarks.

That the ceremonial law was a prefiguration of good things to come, and owed its validity and efficacy entirely to the analogy which it bore to the *true sacrifice,* is placed beyond all reasonable controversy. All that is contended for is, that the reference which it bore was not understood, during the subsistence of that economy, that it is not to be considered as an interpretation of the doctrine of the atonement, so much as a sort of temporary substitute for that discovery, and that it was a system of cyphers, or symbols, the true interpretation of which was reserved to a future period. It is no more essential to the existence of a type, that its import be understood before it is verified, than it is essential to prophecy that its just interpretation be comprehended before it is fulfilled. If we consider the benefit derived to the ancient church, from prophecy in its strictest sense, we shall find it consisted not in making

men prophets, or enabling them to foretel future events, but rather in maintaining high and consolatory views of the providence and the attributes of God, accompanied with a firm but humble assurance of his gracious interposition in their concerns.

A general expectation of the Messiah's advent, as of some glorious and divine personage, who would bestow the highest spiritual and temporal felicity; without descending to details, or foreseeing the *precise method* by which his interposition was to become effectual, appears to have nearly bounded the views of such as "waited for the consolation of Israel." Thus vague and general, at least, were the expectations of the faithful at the time of his appearance: to suppose they were ever materially different, is a gratuitous supposition, totally devoid of proof.

In discussing this point, it is expedient to distinguish betwixt the *fact*, and the *doctrine* of the atonement. The aspect of the atonement of Christ considered as a *transaction*, is towards God; considered as a *doctrine*, towards man. Viewed in the former light, its operation is essential, unchangeable, eternal—"He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Considered in the latter, its operation is moral, and therefore subject to all the varieties incident to human nature. The cross, considered as the meritorious basis of acceptance, the only real satisfaction for sin, is the centre around which all the purposes of mercy to fallen man have continued to revolve: fixed and determined in the council of God, it operated as the grand consideration in the divine mind, on which salvation was awarded to penitent believers in the earliest ages, as it will continue to operate in the same manner to the latest boundaries of time. Hence it is manifest that this great transaction could admit of no substitute. But that discovery of it, which constitutes the *doctrine* of the atonement, though highly important, is not of equal necessity. Its moral impression, its beneficial effects on the mind, were capable of being secured by the institution of sacrifice, though in an inferior degree; while the offender, by confessing his sins over the head of the victim, which he afterwards slew, distinctly recognised his guilt, his just exposure to destruction, and his exclusive reliance on divine mercy.

By such elements of penitential sorrow, and humble submission, accompanied with a general expectation of a Messiah, devout worship-

pers were prepared for the reception of the sublimer mysteries of the gospel; and thus "the law became a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ."

When St. Paul asserts that the same law was a shadow of "good things to come and not the very image of those things," he clearly intimates an essential difference between the two economies, and that the Mosaic did not afford that acquaintance with the method of pardon and reconcilement, which constitutes the distinguishing glory of the gospel. But if the levitical sacrifices instructed the pious Jew in the doctrine of vicarious atonement as it is now exhibited, they were already possessed of the substance, and the law could with no propriety be styled a schoolmaster intended to lead *them* to Christ, who had already arrived thither.

The passage to which we have already adverted, which affirms that the way into the Holiest of all was not made manifest during the continuance of the first tabernacle, merits attentive consideration. From this and other similar passages, many of the Fathers were led to infer that the souls of departed saints were not immediately received at death into the

beatific vision, but waited for their future crowns till the general resurrection, while some of them were permitted to accompany our Saviour at his ascension, as trophies of his victory over the last enemy. As this is a notion which, it is probable, few at present will be disposed to embrace, so it was the necessary result of interpreting the words in too absolute a sense, and of transferring to the *objects themselves,* what may with more propriety be referred to the *conception* entertained of those objects. Chrysostom paraphrases the text by remarking that the way into the Holiest, or into Heaven was (ἀβατος) inaccessible: St. Paul merely affirms that it was not made manifest. Distinct from these two interpretations it seems impossible to find a third: the words must either intend that the way itself was not opened, or that the knowledge of it was not communicated, which is equivalent to asserting that the doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, was reserved to be developed in a future day.

If the justice of these observations be admitted, the situation of jewish believers will appear indeed to have been far removed from that of Christians, and the gospel dispensation will derive a prodigious accession of

splendor from the comparison. It will be seen that they were "shut up," to use the language of inspiration, unto the faith to be revealed, that their state was comparatively gloomy, though not hopeless; and that they were upheld by general assurances of divine mercy, confirmed by the acceptance of their offerings; while they possessed no clear and distinct conception of the way in which it would be displayed, or by what expedient its exercise could be rendered consistent with the immutable holiness and justice of the divine nature.

Ibant obscuri sola sub nocte per umbras.

Led by a way that they knew not, the obscurity with which they were surrounded must often have dismayed them; while the perturbations of conscience, on every recurrence of guilt, would clothe the last enemy with new terrors, and deepen the shades which invest the sepulchre. Hence arose that language of despondency uttered by Hezekiah, David, and others in the prospect of dissolution, together with the gloomy pictures which they frequently draw of the regions beyond the grave, natural to such as were "all their life, through fear of death, subject to bondage." Exposed to danger from which they knew no

definite mode of escape, and placed on the confines of an eternity feebly and faintly illuminated, they had no other resourse besides an *implicit* confidence in mysterious mercy.

But notwithstanding the extreme imperfection of their views, inasmuch as they *cordially* embraced the promises of God in the proportion in which they were then propounded, and cherished the expectation of a great Deliverer in the person of the Messiah, they possessed the spirit of faith. Genuine faith considered as a principle, is characterised not so much by the particular truths which it embraces, as by its origin, its nature, and its effects. When St. Paul describes the faith by which the elders obtained a good report, he refers not to the mysteries of the gospel, but specifies the persuasion that the worlds were made, or created, by the word of God, in opposition to the opinion that they were formed out of pre-existent matter, which universally prevailed in pagan philosophy: he also enumerates among its legitimate objects the belief "that God is, and that he is the rewarder of such as diligently seek him;" and whoever examines with attention the various examples which he adduces of the operation of that principle, must be convinced

that the idea of a vicarious propitiation is not absolutely essential to its nature, however necessary to salvation it has become, in consequence of the clear revelation of that doctrine.

Here then in all probability consists the peculiar glory of the gospel, in contradistinction from the economy of Moses, that it deciphers the figures of the law, accomplishes and absorbs every purpose of its sacrifices, and dispels the obscurity which concealed eternal realities, by placing in a refulgent light that great mystery, hid from ages and generations, "by which God can be just, and yet the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." Thus the rigor and reserve which under the ancient economy generated a spirit of bondage, is exchanged for the glorious liberty of the sons of God. But it is time to return from this digression, which though not totally irrelevant to the subject, has diverted the author's attention longer than he intended from the writer of the *Plea*.

III. In my former treatise the omission of the name of Christ in the baptism of John was urged in proof of its being distinct from the christian ordinance; on the contrary, in the total absence of scriptural evidence, my

opponent contends that he not only baptised in the name of Jesus, but also in that of the Holy Trinity. Supposing such to have been the fact, upon what principle can we account for the silence of the sacred writer, on so important a particular; for that it was important, and would have contributed more to elucidate the nature and extent of his mission than all the circumstances combined, which they have thought fit to record, will scarcely be denied. What similar example occurs in the whole series of scripture history, of a minute and detailed account of a religious ceremony, in which the mention of its most essential feature is suppressed; or who will believe that while the minutest particulars respecting John were deemed worthy of being recorded, one so remarkable and unprecedented as that of his baptising in the name of the Trinity was too trivial to be mentioned; a circumstance of much greater moment surely than his subsisting on locusts, or his being clothed with a girdle. But beside the silence of scripture, which might of itself be deemed sufficiently decisive, the inconsistency of such a proceeding, with the known reserve our Lord uniformly maintained respecting his Messiahship, and his repeated charges to his disciples not to publish that fact, demonstrate the extreme

improbability of his suffering himself to become the avowed object of a religious rite. The employment of his name for *such* a purpose, it is obvious, was equivalent to a public declaration of his being the Messiah, and must have defeated his known intention. In the publication *On Terms of Communion* this argument was repeatedly insisted on, and pursued to such an extent of illustration that we should have supposed it impossible it could either be misunderstood or misrepresented. What is the reply of the author of the *Plea* to this argument? One of the most extraordinary in the annals of controversy: "It is neither more nor less than this, that though our Lord frequently enjoined secrecy as to the dignity of his divine character, and the immediate object of his mission, there is not a single instance in which he manifested any delicacy as to his name."* He afterwards proceeds to tell us with great gravity that his name Jesus was as well known as that of Peter or John, and that he was addressed under that name equally by friends, enemies, and strangers. My reluctance to inflame this controversy with the language of exacerbation reduces me, on this [illegible], to a perplexity how to express myself.

* [illegible] Communion, p. [illegible]

Is it possible, let me ask, he could so far mistake the scope and bearing of the reasoning as to confound the use of the term Jesus, as the proper name, by which he was addressed in the ordinary intercourse of life, with the employment of it with that of the Father and the Holy Ghost, in a holy sacrament? Or will he contend that to call a person by the name of Jesus, or by any other appellation whatever, is precisely the same thing as to baptise in his name? He who is capable of confounding things so essentially distinct, is beyond the reach of reasoning; and if he did not confound them, but wished to put the change upon his readers, from a despair of being able to answer the argument, he has evinced a want of candour and good faith that merits the severest animadversion. Had his publication been a tissue of nonsense and stupidity throughout, we should have been strongly inclined to the former supposition; but when we reflect on the shrewdness which it occasionally displays, joined to his care not to glance in the slightest manner to the true hinge of the controversy, it is difficult not to suspect the latter. It may be questioned whether another person could have been found, acquainted with the English language, but would have instantly perceived

that it was not the author's intention to insinuate a reluctance in our Lord to divulge his name, but the *fact* of his being the Messiah; and that it was the inseparable connection of that fact, with the practice of baptising in his name, which was the ground of my objection. As he has not made the slightest attempt to solve the difficulty, it would be trifling with the patience of the reader to attempt to reinforce it.

IV. The different effects which accompanied baptism, when performed by the Apostles, and by John, were urged as a decisive proof that the two baptisms were essentially distinct, and characteristic of separate economies. To such a distinction our attention is invited by the Forerunner, who affirmed himself to baptise in water only, but that he that came after him should baptise in the Holy Ghost, and in fire. To this the author of the *Plea* replies, by remarking, "that the argument proceeds on incorrect data: it appears to assume that water-baptism, and the baptism of the Holy Ghost, are the same; or that the latter invariably followed the former. It will no doubt be regarded as a remarkable incident, that in the midst of a zealous effort to separate between

what is substantially the same, an attempt should be made to identify what is essentially different." [p]

After describing the baptism of the Holy Ghost as an effect which ordinarily accompanied immersion in the name of Christ, it will be deemed much more remarkable that the author should be accused of confounding them, or that he should be affirmed to have *identified* two things which stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect. If it be a fact that the communication of the Spirit usually accompanied the administration of baptism in the apostolic age, while no such communication was annexed to the ceremony of John, the author's position is correct. In proof of this fact, we have only to consult the Acts of the Apostles, which record the history of the first promulgation of the gospel. We there perceive that St. Peter held out the promise of the Spirit to the people, as a principal inducement to submit to the baptismal sacrament; and that when St. Paul found certain disciples at Ephesus, who, though baptised, had not heard of those supernatural endowments, he expressed his surprise, saying, "Into what then were ye baptised?" a question

[p] Plea for Primitive Communion, p. 29.

totally irrelevant, but upon the supposition that the reception of miraculous gifts was the stated appendage to that ordinance.

The only inquiry which can possibly arise on this subject is, whether John, in foretelling that the Messiah should baptise with the Holy Ghost, intended to allude to the sacramental water, or whether his attention was directed solely to the effusion of the Spirit, without reference to the external rite. This question, however, admits of easy decision, when we recollect that the corporeal rite was the usual preparative for the reception of spiritual gifts, that they were announced in immediate connection with the act of baptising, and that though the ancient prophets almost universally foretold the abundant effusion of spiritual gifts and graces, which succeeded the advent of the Messiah, none before John made use of a figure, which viewed apart from the visible action with which it was associated, would have been scarcely intelligible. His suppression of the mention of *water* is in perfect accordance with the genius of Oriental speech, which in the exhibition of a complex object, is wont to represent it only by its boldest and most impressive feature.

It is not necessary to the support of this reasoning, to assert that the communication of miraculous gifts *invariably* accompanied baptism: it is quite sufficient to account for the language of John, as well as to sustain the inference deduced from it, that such was the *stated* order. The instance of the Samaritans recorded in the eighth of the Acts, is urged as an exception, but when attentively examined, it is none. We are informed, indeed, that though they were already baptised, the Holy Ghost was fallen upon none of them; not, however, because the gift of the Spirit did not usually accompany the administration of that rite, but because the Apostles, to whom alone the power of conferring it belonged, were not present. The case of the Apostles themselves, and of Cornelius, it is admitted, may be considered as exceptions. In the former instance the outward ceremony was superseded, as we apprehend, partly by the previous baptism of the Spirit, and partly by their having been converted to Christianity before the institution of that rite. In the latter, there was merely an inversion of the usual order: the Spirit was given prior to the administration of baptism, instead of succeeding it; but still they were closely conjoined in point of time, and sufficiently connected to justify the language of John.

To relieve the tediousness of the present discussion, let me here present the reader with a sample of the author's logic: "If these supernatural effects," he triumphantly remarks, "are invariably to follow immersion in water, in order to demonstrate that this is really christian baptism, how is it they were copiously enjoyed by some who are supposed never to have received this institution."[q] By an argument precisely similar, it were easy to demonstrate that the possession of reason is no essential ingredient in the constitution of human nature. For it might with equal propriety be urged, if such a principle enters necessarily into the definition of human nature, how is it that it is copiously enjoyed by beings (angels for example) who are supposed never to have received such a nature? This reply may be deemed amply sufficient for such a mode of reasoning: but in addition to this, let it be observed, that it was neither asserted nor insinuated, that miraculous gifts are invariably requisite to constitute christian baptism; but simply that the fact of their accompanying it, when performed by the Apostles, was held up by John as a striking feature in the new dispensation. And where is the absurdity of

[q] Plea for Primitive Communion, p. 30.

admitting that, without contending for its perpetuity, miraculous gifts sufficiently marked the *transition* from one economy to another; or that it is a peculiarity worthy of mention among the characteristics of a period, denominated in distinction from every preceding one, the dispensation of the Spirit.

V. Apprehensive of fatiguing the attention of the reader, we hasten to the last particular connected with this branch of the controversy, which is the decisive proof of the truth of my hypothesis, resulting from the fact, that the disciples of John were *baptised* by St. Paul. As the author of the *Plea,* however, finds it necessary to contradict it, it will be proper to quote the whole passage, as it stands in the common translation, the accuracy of which no critic has impeached:—"And it came to pass while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts, came to Ephesus, and finding certain disciples, he said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptised? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said he, John verily baptised with the baptism of re-

pentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied."[r] In examining this passage, with a view to the inquiry whether these men were baptised by St. Paul, or not, it is the fifth verse which especially claims our attention. The question turns entirely on the interpretation of the following words:—"When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus." These words must be understood either as the language of St. Paul, or of Luke the historian. Our opponents contend that they are to be understood as a continuance of St. Paul's address, in which he describes the nature and effects of John's baptism. Upon this interpretation the passage last quoted has no relation to the disciples at Ephesus, except as it was intended for their instruction, it is descriptive not of what befel those disciples, but to the general submission of the jewish people to the rite administered by John. And as it is asserted in the next verse that

[r] Acts xix. 1—6.

St. Paul laid his hands upon *them*, and they received the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, we are led to a most extraordinary paradox, the assertion that St. Paul actually laid his hands not on the persons mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph, but on that part of the jewish people at large, who had been baptised by John, to whom he also communicated prophetic gifts. But as this proposition is too hard even for the powerful digestion of our opponents, they are compelled to adopt another expedient, which is to separate the relative pronouns in the last verse, and refer them, not to their immediate antecedent, but to a very remote one, at the distance of several verses. The only apology they make for this strange perversion of the language of inspiration is, that such interruptions of continuity are not uncommon, whereas we challenge them to produce a single instance of such a construction, not merely in the New Testament, but in the whole compass of Greek literature. Examples may possibly be adduced, where the relative pronoun is connected with an antecedent equally remote, but none most assuredly where its relation to an immediate antecedent is so obvious, and so natural, that the true interpretation in opposition to that which presents itself at first sight, becomes a perfect

enigma. Were there difficulties arising on each side, we might be induced to acquiesce in a construction, which however unnatural, or unusual, suggested the only consistent sense; but to have recourse to such a contrivance merely to avoid that construction, which is recommended by every rule of grammar, and against which not a shadow of objection lies, except its repugnance to hypothesis, is a proceeding at which liberal criticism must blush. If such a mode of expounding scripture were adopted on other occasions, it is difficult to say what absurdity might not be obtruded on the sacred volume. The manner in which the author of the *Plea* criticises the passage is such as might be expected from the advocate of so hopeless a cause. He neither ventures to quote it, nor to make the slightest remark on its principal clauses; but contents himself with putting a speech into the mouth of St. Paul, in which every thing runs perfectly smooth and easy; and since it is much easier to make speeches than to elucidate difficulties, or establish paradoxes, we commend his policy. His only remaining effort is confined to the introduction of a parallel passage; but unfortunately it turns out that his pretended parallel affords an example of as plain and obvious a construction of words as is

to be found in the sacred pages. It is a passage which instead of presenting a choice of difficulties, difficulties of *his* kind I mean, where grammar is on one side, and hypothesis on the other, suggests a sense in which all mankind have acquiesced—a sense which no degree of stupidity can miss, or artifice evade.* The only resemblance it bears to the portion of history under consideration is, that it relates a similar incident, where, certain persons who had been baptised had not yet received the gifts of the Holy Ghost. To attempt the defence of a most unnatural interpretation of Greek words, not by an appeal to a passage which exhibits a similar peculiarity of construction, but merely a similarity of occurrence, is egregious trifling.

To the argument founded on the extreme improbability that none of the numerous converts on the day of Pentecost were previously disciples of John, no reply is attempted.

* This wonder-working passage is as follows:—"Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost."—*Acts* viii. 14—17.

I cannot dismiss this subject without noticing the extreme deficiency of information respecting the history of religious opinions this author evinces, when he stigmatises the sentiments advanced, as a modern theory. They are so far from meriting that reproach, that they boast the suffrages of all the Fathers, without exception, who have touched upon the subject; nor would it be easy to discover a single divine previous to the Reformation by whom they were not embraced; and since that period they have received the sanction of a Grotius, a Hammond, a Whitby, a Doddridge, a Chillingworth, and a multitude of other names of nearly equal celebrity. On an accurate inquiry, it will probably be found that the absurd interpretation of the passage we have just been considering, which is so necessary to the support of the opposite hypothesis, originated in the horror excited at the conduct of the Anabaptists at Munster, by which certain divines of the Reformation felt themselves strongly disposed to shun whatever might bear the semblance or colour of anabaptism; that, in short, the doctrine here advanced is the revival of an ancient, rather than the invention of a new opinion.

To the sincere inquirer the antiquity or the novelty of a doctrine will appear a consideration

of little moment, compared to the evidence by which it is supported; yet as a natural prejudice exists against violent departures from the ancient course of interpretation, it is but just to endeavour as much as possible to disengage the cause of truth from this incumbrance.

The author of the *Plea* expresses a sort of horror at the thought of a plurality of baptisms, forgetting, it should seem, that the doctrine of *baptisms* in the plural number is placed by St. Paul amongst the first principles of the oracles of God. It is difficult to conceive to what baptisms he could refer, except those which are the subject of the present discussion: the baptism of the Spirit, which was the highest gift of God, could with little propriety be termed a doctrine, much less enumerated amongst the first principles of Christianity; and the jewish washings constituted no part of that system.

Having presented the reasons on which the baptism of John was affirmed to be essentially distinct from the christian ordinance at so much length, it is high time to relieve the attention of the reader, by dismissing the subject.

There is one more observation, and one only,

to which the author requests his attention. If we admit that the jewish people were baptised in the name of Christ, considering the prodigious multitudes who repaired to John for that purpose, the conduct of a great part of that nation must be viewed in a new light; and instead of being chargeable with a uniform rejection of the Messiah, they must be considered as *apostates*: upon this supposition they violated the most sacred engagements, and impiously crucified their Prince, after consecrating themselves to his service by the most awful solemnities. The Evangelist informs us that "he came to his own, but his own received him not;" but the more accurate statement would have been, that they first received, and afterwards rejected him; received him on the testimony of the Forerunner, and rejected him after witnessing the immaculate purity of his life, the wisdom of his discourses, and the splendour of his miracles.

There is attached to apostacy a character of perfidy and baseness peculiar to itself, a species of guilt which the inspired writers frequently paint in the darkest colours, yet, strange to tell! though they had no motives to conceal or palliate the conduct of their countrymen in their treatment of the Messiah, but many

motives to the contrary, not a syllable escapes them of the charge of apostacy. What terrible energy would that accusation have lent to St. Peter's address; what unspeakable advantage for alarming their consciences would he have derived from reminding them of their baptismal vows, and of their unspeakable impiety in crucifying the divine person to whom they had previously dedicated themselves in solemn rites of religion. When St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians, gives loose to one of his finest bursts of indignant feeling and rapid eloquence, in a brief portraiture of the character of his countrymen, the circumstance which would have given incredible force to the picture is suppressed; and not having perused the author of the *Plea*, he seems to entertain no suspicion of their having been baptised in the name of Jesus. It is not less unaccountable that the ancient prophets contain no allusion to this event, but describe the future rejection of the Messiah as coeval with his appearance; and that the most singular fact in sacred history, is neither the subject of narration, nor of prophecy, but was reserved for the detection of the nineteenth century.

Having replied to this anonymous writer on every particular connected with the baptism

of John, it is unnecessary to trouble the reader, by animadverting on the other parts of his performance: the few observations it contains which are pertinent to the subject, are too loose and superficial to deserve attention, especially since a work is announced by a writer who will probably discuss the remaining topics with superior ability. We shall notice only two circumstances illustrative of the author's management of the controversy. He devotes his first section to a synopsis of the principles advanced in the treatise *On Terms of Communion;* which he has extended to the number of fourteen. Several of these, disguised by a little variety of language, are identically the same; some grossly misrepresented; and all of them expressed, not in the terms of the author, but in such as are adapted to give them as much of the air of paradox as possible. It is obvious that he who wishes to judge of them fairly, must view them in their proper place, accompanied with their respective proofs and illustrations; and that to tear them from their connection, and exhibit them in a naked form, though they had been expressed in the author's own terms, is a direct appeal to prejudice. The obvious design is to deter the reader at the outset, and to dispose him to prejudge the cause before it is heard. To

mingle in the course of a controversy insinuations and innuendos which have no other tendency than to impair the impartiality of the reader, is too common an artifice; but such an open barefaced appeal to popular prejudice is of rare occurrence. It is an expedient to which no man will condescend, who is conscious of possessing superior resources. To this part of his performance no reply will be expected; for though the author feels himself fully equal to the task of answering his opponent, he confesses himself quite at a loss to answer himself. Like a certain animal in the Eastern part of the world, who is reported to be extremely fond of climbing a tree for that purpose, he merely pelts the author with his own produce.

Another charge, however, is adduced of more serious import. For presuming to speak of conditions of salvation, he is accused of employing anti-evangelical language, and suspicions of his orthodoxy are pretty broadly insinuated. When the term *conditions* of salvation, or words of similar import, are employed, he wishes it once for all to be clearly understood that he utterly disclaims the notion of *meritorious* conditions, and that he intends by that term only what is necessary in the

established order of means, a *sine qua non*, that without which another thing cannot take place. When thus defined, to deny there are conditions of salvation, is not to approach to antinomianism merely, it is to fall into the gulph. It is nothing less than a repeal of all the sanctions of revelation, of all the principles of moral government. Let the idea of *conditional* salvation, in the sense already explained, be steadily rejected along with the term, and the patrons of the worst of heresies will have nothing further to demand. That repentance, faith, and their fruits in a holy life, supposing life to be continued, are essential prerequisites to eternal happiness, is a doctrine inscribed as with a sun beam in every page of revelation; and must we, in deference to the propagators of an epidemic pestilence, be doomed to express by obscure and feeble circumlocutions a truth which one word will convey, especially when that word, or others of a precisely similar meaning, has been current in the productions of unquestionable orthodoxy and piety, in every age? The author is at a loss to conceive on what principle, or for what reason, dangerous concessions are due to antinomianism; that thick-skinned monster of the ooze and the mire, which no weapon can pierce, no discipline can tame. If it be replied, why adhere

to an offensive term, when its meaning may be expressed in other words, or at least by a more circuitous mode of expression? The obvious answer is, that words and ideas are closely associated, and that though ideas give birth to terms, appropriate terms become in their turn the surest safeguard of ideas, insomuch that a truth which is never announced but in a circuitous and circumlocutory form, will either have no hold, or a very feeble one, on the public mind. The anxiety with which the precise, the appropriate term is avoided, bespeaks a shrinking, a timidity, a distrust with relation to the idea conveyed by it, which will be interpreted as equivalent to its disavowal. While antinomianism is making such rapid strides through the land, and has already convulsed and disorganised so many of our churches, it is not the season for half measures; danger is to be repelled by intrepid resistance, by stern defiance—not by compliances and concessions: it is to be opposed, if opposed successfully, by a return to the wholesome dialect of purer times. Such is the intimate alliance betwixt words and things, that the solicitude with which the term *condition*, and others of similar import, have been avoided by some excellent men, has contributed more than a little to the growth of this wide-spreading pestilence. As almost every

age of the church is marked by its appropriate visitation of error, so little penetration is requisite to perceive that antinomianism is the epidemic malady of the present, and that it is an evil of gigantic size, and deadly malignity. It is qualified for mischief by the very properties which might seem to render it merely an object of contempt—its vulgarity of conception, its paucity of ideas, its determined hostility to taste, science, and letters. It includes within a compass which every head can contain, and every tongue can utter, a system which cancels every moral tie, consigns the whole human race to the extremes of presumption or despair, erects religion on the ruins of morality, and imparts to the dregs of stupidity all the powers of the most active poison. The author will ever feel himself honoured by whatever censures he may incur, through his determined opposition to such a system.

Finis.

Combe, Printer, Leicester.